

INFORMED

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CONNECTED AT FAYETTEVILLE FIRST UMC

Drawing Closer to Christ Rev. Dr. Thomas Martin

Eisegesis: Using a scripture to fit one's own worldview

Exegesis: Studying scripture in depth with attention to historical interpretation and meaning

Pastoring: The vain and feeble attempt to use exegesis to inform and instruct a local community built upon mutual understandings and shared values while avoiding division

(Definitions are my own.)

I don't think anyone really wants to hear what I have to say as a person. Particularly when 1) we are faced with a crisis, 2) too many voices already are sharing opinions, and 3) I am not the smartest person with answers. Yet, here I am committing thoughts into the eternity of print and the internet.

In loosening restrictions, we have freedom we experience as citizens of this state and country. We should never take those freedoms and liberties lightly, especially never taking for granted those who have made sacrifices to preserve those liberties. Yet being part of a society also means that our actions help shape and determine the future for those around us. This is ever more true in our current situation which is loaded with uncertainty.

In the next few days, weeks, months, and years we will continue to have uncertainty as it relates to COVID-19. The rest of life, however, is not taking a break. Illness, death, birth, and life are ever on the move. There will be economic uncertainties, health concerns, and questions as we move forward as a society. But I have been pondering the verse from 1 Corinthians in my head for a while.

Paul is dealing with an argument within a congregation about eating meat previously sacrificed to idols. Newcomers to the faith have been living a life that would be considered "unclean" or "an abomination" by religious standards by eating the meat that was deemed unclean. As a result, the religious leaders were preventing new "idol meat eaters" from being part of the leadership of the church. Likewise, the "idol meat eaters" knew it made no difference to God what they ate (after all, Jesus said, *"It is not what goes into the mouth but comes from it that defiles a person."* Matthew 15:11). People on both sides of an argument were destroying the church and harming its witness. That division is what Paul was seeking to address in this pastoral letter.

So what do we do with our liberty in this present age? Do we go all out or do we consider those who might be harmed in mind, body, or spirit by our freedom? If we continue reading in 1 Corinthians, we would see where Paul writes, *"But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ."* It seems then that all of us have the choice to make whether we will uphold one another or distance ourselves from Christ.

Herein lies the great paradox of our time: our physical distancing is actually making it possible for us to draw closer to Christ. By staying away from physical congregational worship, we are drawing closer to Christ. We are preserving the bond of fellowship by keeping each other safe. So the question then becomes, "When can we gather again?"

"But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."
(1 Corinthians 8:9)



The Bishop and Cabinet of North Georgia have suggested that as congregations we uphold the CDC recommended date of physical distancing until May 13, which we will do. As we consider the freedom that we have as citizens of this nation and, more importantly as children of God, it is prudent to consider where our freedom may cause others to stumble.

I hope you will pray with me for those whose strength is keeping this country open: workers in the healthcare profession, food service and grocery store employees, first responders, essential and non-essential workers alike, and all those who are helpers in these times of uncertainty. Let us pray for safety for them and for us. Let us pray for kindness in and through our freedom. Let us be the church who considers the needs of all the saints as a priority for the building of the kingdom. I want to leave you with another pastoral letter, this time from Hebrews 10:23, *“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.”*



The Drive-Thru at FFUMC

Hours: Monday-Friday, 11 AM - Noon

Menu: NO LIMITS!

PRAYER with a minister

FOOD drop-off for Fayette Samaritans

ENCOURAGEMENT from a distance

inspired . . .

Please share your stories and pictures with Thomas at tmartin@fayettevillefirst.com.

Your acts of kindness and care may inspire others.

On the Front Lines

We are inspired by so many who are risking their own health to help others.



Robbie Gray, who works for the CDC, volunteered to work in a quarantine section in Newark as people returned to the US from abroad.

Dottie Gray's niece, Caroline Schaefer, normally a nurse at Children's Health Care of Atlanta, is currently caring for COVID patients in NYC for 21 days.



God Will Make a Way

*God will make a way
Where there seems to be no way.
He works in ways we cannot see;
He will make a way for me.
He will be my guide,
Hold me closely to His side
With love and strength for each new day,
He will make a way. He will make a way.*



Pat Hobson shares these lyrics from a song by Don Moen. You may find Pat busy with the Seasoned Singers or playing the dulcimer all over. Pat is pictured in the center beside husband, David, and Beverly Redd sharing music at Azalea Estates Assisted Living.